

February 2016

## Union Ave.

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### Recommended Citation

Ramirez, Daniela (2016) "Union Ave.," *First-Gen Voices: Creative and Critical Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/fgv/vol5/iss1/6>

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I run out of my bedroom door with two of my three favorite *Sky Dancers* Barbies that I absolutely love to play with. They are those types of dolls that you can insert into a base, a base that is really decorated and full of bright colors. Once the doll is put in place and prepared for liftoff, you pull on the string attached to the base and the Barbie launches into the air and flies towards the ceiling. It's basically flying. Right now I only have two out of three of these dolls. Meaning, one of them was either stolen by my older brothers (unlikely—but possible), or they are just lost for the moment. But mom can't know that.

Good thing mom left for work already. She works down the street at *Lucy's* as a cashier. I love that she works close to our house. This morning I asked her if I could go to work with her, but she said no. She insisted that I needed to start picking up my toys, especially because a couple months ago I started the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. I insisted that my toys were placed throughout the house on purpose, not lost.

"*Mami*, I promise. Everything is where it's supposed to be." I told her as I looked under the bed as I looked for my *Sky Dancer*. I had to remind myself to act normal and not panic. They had to be here somewhere, right?

"*Oh si, te voy a creer*. I expect this house to be nice and tidy when I get back. I don't want to see any Barbies or books thrown around. I mean it this time, Danielita. You're my partner when I'm not home. *Verdad?*" She asked. She kissed me and left me to sleep the rest of that Saturday morning.

*Sky Dancers* in hand later that day, I was determined to find their third missing friend. I know this house like the back of my hand. It's the very first house mom ever bought when she came to the United States from Nicaragua almost 9 years ago. It means everything to us: safe haven, party-central, the ultimate real-life Mario Kart racing map for our bike races.

Our house is in the lovely (but not very safe according to mom) neighborhood of Pico-Union in what can be called Central LA. I love our house! It is white and has yellow window frames, a white metal front door, and white-metal railings that cover the front porch. It is white and yellow... but also green. It's surrounded by so much green. Whether it's the rich and fluffy front lawn that grandpa dedicates so much time taking care of, or the really big tree that is covered in green leaves that provide the perfect shade during the summer. Grandpa is constantly making sure there is plenty of life surrounding our house. Our house is white, yellow, and green—lots and lots of green.

*Sky Dancers* in hand inside our house, I run to the kitchen to ask grandma if she knew anything on the whereabouts of my doll. Grandma is hard at work cooking lunch for the day. She is standing in front of the stove wearing one of her pretty pantsuits that she always wore. Grandma is the prettiest grandma I've ever seen, besides my *bisabuela*, but she's my great-grandma, not just "grandma" so I don't think it counts.

“*Abuelita*, have you seen my doll? The other one of these?” I ask as I show her the two that I have.

“*No, amor. Perdón...*” she apologizes as she continues doing what she’s doing.

“*Abuelita*, you’re not even looking! *Mira, Mira!*” I plead as I brush the hair of my *Sky Dancers* with my small hands.

“*Hijita, estoy ocupada. Quítate de aquí! Te vas a quemar. Salte de aquí. Go Go Go!*” She said frustrated with my incessant pleas.

I run out of the kitchen like grandma said and decide to turn my trek towards my two older brothers’ room. I peek into the living room and notice one of the two, Sergio, sitting watching TV. My older brother Denis was probably out with his friends. Sergio and Denis never let me go into their room, so this is the perfect chance! If I get caught being sneaky this time, Sergio and Denis will never let me play with their new *Nintendo*. Like a ninja, I make my way to their room, but suddenly notice grandpa sitting outside alone on our porch.

Through the metal door, I see Grandpa is sitting with his lower body facing us, but his upper body facing away. He is looking at the busy street we live on, Union Ave. He just stares. Grandpa had eye-surgery months ago and he is having trouble feeling better. His right eye is covered in a Band-Aid... I think Sergio called it a gauze. Even though he had a Band-Aid on his eye, he still wore his glasses. He looked the same, but different—distant, but I try my best to make him smile or even just hug him. He doesn’t notice me walk onto the porch.

“*Abuelito*, I need help finding my doll. I can’t find it.” I say sadly showing him the two of the three of my *Sky Dancers*. Grandpa turns his full attention to me and picks me up and sits me on his lap. The sun is out but the porch’s roof extends over us, protecting us like our house does kinda.

“*¿Que pasó?*” Grandpa asks me, as if he is completely oblivious as to what I had just said. It’s like he didn’t hear me.

“I said, I can’t find my doll, grandpa. I don’t know where it is and I want to find it before mom gets home. I promised her I would help keep the house clean.” I explain.

Grandpa bounces me on his leg as he usually did and begins to ask me the places I should check: “*¿El cuarto mío? ¿El tuyo? ¿El cuarto de Sergio y Denis?*” I consider his suggestions, and I had definitely checked grandma and grandpa’s room, I checked my room, but I have yet to check Sergio and Denis’ room. But I doubt my doll would be there, I just know it. Sergio never lets me play in their room because he is 10 now and Denis is 14, so 6 year olds can’t play with them, so my Barbie can’t be in there.

“*No lo creo, Abuelito*. I’ve already looked everywhere I could possibly think of!” I said as I continue playing with my *Sky Dancers*’ hair.

Grandpa hugs me slightly. I love grandpa very much. He has been distant lately, but I know he loves us. And I know he sometimes hits Sergio and me when we misbehave, but he loves us.

“*Ya se... ve a chequear el cuarto de tu tía y tío...*” Grandpa suggests, as he turns his head once again towards Union Ave.

“Ok *Abuelito*, I’ll go check *Tia* and *Tio*’s room.” I say as I jump off of grandpa’s lap, his upper body already turned away. I make my way to my aunt and uncle’s room, or what used to be the garage.

The garage was turned into a room years before for my aunt and uncle to live in when they got pregnant with my baby cousin, Horacito. I decide to go through the kitchen but just as I do, grandma stops me right in my tracks.

“Daniela, please tell your *Abuelito* not to move from where he’s at because lunch is almost ready. Go tell him, now, now.” She hurries me as she finishes some last minute things for lunch. I quickly obey and run back out to the porch only to find my grandpa standing facing Union Ave.

“*Abuelito*, grandma says not to move from this spot, ok? Because the food is almost ready! I’m going to run to the garage and look for my doll but I’ll be right back to eat with you.” I say quickly before running off, not waiting for a response.

My doll is probably in the garage because I always play with Horacito, and sometimes I lose my toys there. I reenter the kitchen and go into the den. I love the den because it makes the garage feel like it’s not a garage, but a part of the house. Our white, yellow and green house feels like a mansion. As I run through the den, I’m stopped in my tracks again, but this time by my Aunt who is walking inside for lunch with Horacito.

“Hi *Tia*...” I smile politely at her and look past her slightly to peek at my destination: their room.

“Hi *mija*, what are you up to? Isn’t it time for lunch?” She asks suspiciously. I can see what it looks like to her: I probably want to go outside and play or something.

“Yes! It is, but I wanted to check if I left one of my toys in your room--one of these toys. It’s a Barbie like these!” I show her the two of the three *Sky Dancers* in my hand.

“Oh... hmmm, I think it is in the room, *mija*; but you can get it later, after we eat some lunch, ok? Once you two eat, we can head back and look extra well.” She says matter-a-factly. I know at this point there was no arguing with her.

“Okay *Tía*, if you say so... Can I help serving lunch then?” I ask her. After seconds of thinking dramatically, she agrees. My aunt is so incredibly nice and loving. She always lets me play in their room and sometimes lets me take care of Horacito when she goes to the restroom or if she has to get laundry. And she’s also really funny.

We walk back to the kitchen and I begin helping grandma and my aunt serve the plates with food for lunch. Grandma is screaming out for everyone to get their plates now while it was still hot. The food smells absolutely delicious. It fills my nose, making my mouth water. Grandma's voice talking to my aunt and the sound of big spoons hitting grandma's pots and pans serving lunch dances in my ears. I am still holding my *Sky Dancers*—they feel secure in my arms.

A sudden screech of tires loudly invades and takes captive of whatever I am hearing, feeling or touching. Something has happened. The screams and cries that come from outside make it's way into our house. Someone has been hit. The sounds I hear were chilling, and covering me in goose-bumps. I am so scared, but am the first to react. I am faster than anyone else in our house. I drop everything in my hands and run out of the kitchen, my plate shatters on the floor. My *Sky Dancers* are completely forgotten.

I run outside.

I run toward our white-metal door.

I run past our white house with the yellow window frames.

I run past our green-lush grass and green lush trees.

I run towards Union Ave and hear screams behind me.

I see a car first. It's a black car. Inside the car there is a woman screaming and crying hysterically. Then I see him. It's Grandpa laying on the black pavement, and the pavement is stained with Grandpa's blood. There is a lot of blood everywhere and there is a loud screams The screaming is initially muffled and distant.

"No!"

The screaming gets louder as I get closer to our metal fence dividing the sidewalk and our house. *Who's screaming?*

"Noo!"

The screaming is constant and is getting much and much closer. I stop walking and cover my ears to help muffle the screams from hurting my ears any longer. As I cover my ears, the scream becomes loudest—I'm the one screaming uncontrollably.

I am screaming hysterically. Grandpa is lying on the pavement on Union Ave and is not standing up. I am being picked up and pulled away by someone... I start to kick. I need to stay with grandpa. I can't leave him alone; he is going to stand up. I continue to scream.

"*Abuelito! Abuelito! Por favor! Párate! Grandpa! Grandpa! I'm sorry, Abuelito! I'm sorry! I'm sorry about everything but please get up! Abuelito! Abuelito!*"

This quickly becomes my mantra. It is a prayer, it is a song, and is a plea. I think it internally, and then begin saying it out loud. I continue to get pulled back

by someone. A hand is put over my mouth to muffle my screams. *Let me scream. He can hear me. I need to wait until he stands up.*

“*Quiten a la niña de aqui! Alguien!*”

“Someone call an ambulance! Anyone!”

“*Ya vienen! They’re on their way! Ya vienen!*”

It’s my aunt. My aunt is carrying me and pulling me away. My aunt is covering my eyes and is crying as she pulls me into her arms. I look over at grandpa—I fight her hold. Sergio is with grandpa. Sergio isn’t crying...or maybe he is. He’s going to get up. Grandpa is going to get up.

Grandma is with grandpa.

Grandma is on the ground with grandpa.

Grandma? My aunt doesn’t stop holding me.

Grandma.

The woman in the car continues to sit in the car.

Why doesn’t she get out of the car? There are people screaming at her from the outside of the car... that’s why she doesn’t get out.

She’s scared.

My vision is really blurry. I rub my eyes so I can see the woman. *Get out of the car. I’m scared too.*

There is a lot of red. There is a lot of red everywhere. The police officers, firefighters and ambulance people arrive now. They’re going to help grandpa up. There is more red everywhere. I begin to get pulled further and further away from Union Ave and closer to our house. I am almost out of sight.

Until I hear one new scream.

This is a very specific scream. This scream projects through the air, bouncing off the houses. This scream is pain. The voice screaming is so familiar, but the scream I have never heard before.

The person screaming is my mom. Everyone on Pico-Union knows each other, and they must have told her. She ran from work. Mom is on the ground with grandpa, grandma and Sergio. Mom is screaming and asking grandpa to stand up. Mom is begging that grandpa wakes up. *Grandpa, are you asleep?* Mom is now standing and running to the car with the woman sitting inside. My mom is held back by one of our neighbors and is screaming more. Mom is mad, but is still really sad. *Mommy don’t be sad. It’s going to be ok.*

The woman is crying hysterically and is telling mom to forgive her.

*Abuelito*

*Abuelito*

*Abuelito.*

The day my grandfather died was the day that our life completely altered. I don't know who picked up his body, who removed the car, or who cleaned up the blood off of the street after. Whoever "cleaned up" grandpa's blood did the best they could, but for a long time the spot on the pavement where grandpa's body lay turned little darker than the rest of the street. My family and I tried to move on and continue living at our house on Union Ave. Grandma stopped smoking, mom and dad divorced later that year, my oldest brother Denis moved away with dad and I wouldn't see either of them for 11 years. I was asked to repeat the 1<sup>st</sup> grade because I was falling behind (mom agreed that this was what was best). We tried our best to continue living life in the house on Union Ave.

Every day for the next 2 years, we would drive out of our driveway over the spot where my grandfather was hit by a car and killed instantly.

Every day, I would walk back home from school with my brother and walk on the sidewalk next to the spot where my grandfather was hit by a car and killed instantly.

Every day, we would eat dinner in the house that sat on the street next to the spot where my grandfather was hit by a car and killed instantly.

Just as grandpa died, so did life in this house soon after. The grass stopped getting watered and turned brown and disheveled. The moment of grandpa's death replayed in my head for years—a recurring nightmare. We moved away from our house on Union Ave.

